

NIETZSCHE IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN EXPERIENCE

THOMAS MANN

WHEN at the beginning of the year 1889 the news began to spread from Turin and Basel of Nietzsche's mental breakdown, many of those, scattered throughout Europe, who already possessed a measure of understanding of the fateful greatness of this man may have repeated to themselves Ophelia's lamentation: "O, what a noble mind is here o'er-thrown!"

And of the characterizations contained in the verses following this, which mourn the terrible misfortune that so lofty an intellect, "blasted by ecstasy," should now ring dissonant like bells out of tune, many fit Nietzsche exactly—not least among them the words in which the grieving heroine epitomizes her praise: "The observ'd of all observers." We ourselves would use the word

NIETZSCHE was one of the most, if not the most, influential philosopher since Hegel. Enough history has been made by now to justify an assessment of his thinking by facing it with the consequences it has produced. Often enough, Nietzsche has been called the philosopher of the Nazis and Fascists, but it is not sufficiently recognized that he has had a tremendous influence on almost all modern thought, in the anti-fascist as well as fascist camp. THOMAS MANN has made no secret of his own great debt to Nietzsche, yet this does not prevent him from here drawing up a balance sheet in which Nietzsche's liabilities are no less revealed than his assets. It is only by doing this that what is valuable in Nietzsche's thought can be salvaged for us—and such a salvaging is very necessary lest we lose, simply because of certain fallacies entangled in them, the great lessons in thinking and feeling this sick genius still has to offer. Thomas Mann, perhaps the greatest living novelist, now resides in Southern California, to which he returned this fall after a first, postwar trip to Europe. His latest novel, an eight-hundred-page work on the life of a German composer in our times, *Doktor Faustus*, has just been published in German in Sweden and is scheduled for publication in English in the fall of 1948.

"fascinating" instead, and, indeed, in all world literature and the history of the human mind, we would seek in vain a personality more fascinating than that of the hermit of Sils Maria. Yet it is a fascination closely related to the one which radiates across the centuries from that great character created by Shakespeare, the melancholy prince of Denmark.

Nietzsche, the thinker and writer, "the mould of form," as Ophelia would call him, was a personality of phenomenal cultural richness and complexity, summing up all that is essentially European, a personality that had absorbed much from the past, a past which—in more or less conscious imitation and continuation—it recalled, repeated, and made again present in a mythical way; and I have no doubt that the great lover of masquerade was well aware of the Hamlet-like trait in the tragic drama of life he presented—I am tempted to say: enacted.

As far as I, the emotionally absorbed reader and "observer" of the generation after, am concerned, I sensed this relationship early and at the same time I experienced a mixture of feelings that contained, especially for a youthful heart, something very novel, exciting, and engrossing: the mixture of veneration and pity. I have never ceased to experience it. It is tragic pity for an overloaded, overcharged soul that was only called to knowledge, not really born to it, and, like Hamlet, was destroyed by it; for a sensitive, fine, and good soul that needed love and inclined toward noble friendship, that was never meant for loneliness and yet was condemned to just that: the most profound, most frigid loneliness, the loneliness of the criminal; for a spirituality at first deeply pious, entirely destined for reverence and bound to religious tradition, which fate dragged, practically by the hair, into the wild and drunken role of a prophet of barbarically resplendent force, of a hardened conscience, of evil, a role devoid of all piety and raging against the prophet's own very nature.

IT is necessary to take a look at the origins of this mind, to investigate the influences at work in the formation of this personality—influences that worked without the man's nature having ever resented them as the least bit uncongenial—in order to realize the implausible adventurousness of his life's course, its complete unpredictability.

Born amid the rusticity of Central Germany in 1844, four years before the attempt at a bourgeois German revolution, Nietzsche stemmed on both his mother's and father's side from respectable ministers' families. Ironically enough, there is in existence a paper written by his grandfather on "The Eternal Duration of Christianity: a Reassurance During the Present Unrest." His father was something like a courtier, tutor of Prussian princesses, and owed his parish to the patronage of Frederick William IV. Thus a taste for aristocratic forms, moral strictness, a sense of honor, and punctilious love of order were all native to his parents' home.

After the early death of his father the boy lived in Naumburg, that piously church-going and royalist city of civil servants. He is described as "phenomenally well-behaved," a confirmed prig, serious in a well-bred way and with a pious solemnity that got him the name of "the little pastor." Well-known is a characteristic anecdote telling how, during a cloudburst, he walked home from school with measured and dignified steps—because school regulations made proper deportment in the street obligatory for children. He finished his high-school education brilliantly under the famous monastic discipline at Schulpforta. He was inclined toward theology, and also toward music, but then decided on classical philology and studied that subject in Leipzig under a strict methodologist named Ritschl. He succeeded so well that no sooner had he completed his compulsory military service as an artilleryman than he was called, still practically an adolescent, to an academic chair, and this in the serious and pious, patricianly governed city of Basel.

One gets the impression of a highly gifted and noble normality that assured him, apparently, an impeccable and eminent career. Instead of that, what a drifting into trackless wastes! How he went astray on mortal heights! The expression "to go astray" has now become a moral and spiritual judgment, but it originated in explorer's language and

was used to describe the situation of the traveler who has lost all sense of direction in an uncharted region. It sounds like philistinism to apply this expression to a man who was most certainly not only the greatest philosopher of the late 19th century, but also one of the most fearless of all heroes in the realm of thought. But Jakob Burckhardt, whom Nietzsche looked up to as to a father, was no philistine, and yet he early detected in the mental outlook of his younger friend an inclination—nay more, a determination—to strike out on dangerous paths and go mortally astray. Wisely, Burckhardt separated himself from him, dropped him with a certain indifference that was really self-preservation of the kind we see in Goethe, too. . . .

WHAT was it that drove Nietzsche into uncharted heights, that whipped him upward under torments, and made him die a martyr's death upon the cross of thought? It was his fate—and that fate was his genius. But this genius has still another name. That name is: sickness—which word is to be understood, not in the vague and general sense that makes it so easy to associate with the notion of genius, but in such a specific and clinical application that, once again, one has to risk being suspected of narrow-mindedness and reproached for attempting to depreciate the creative life-work of a spirit which, as verbal artist, thinker, and psychologist, changed the entire atmosphere of its time. But that suspicion would be a misunderstanding. It has been said often, and I say it again: sickness is something purely schematic. What is important is that to which it is joined, that in which it fulfills itself. What is important is *who* is sick: an ordinary blockhead, in whose case the sickness would, of course, be without any spiritual or cultural meaning, or a Nietzsche, a Dostoevsky. The medical and pathological aspect is *one* aspect of the truth, its naturalistic one so to speak, and anyone devoted to the truth as a whole, and determined to honor it unconditionally, will never let intellectual prudery make him deny any point of view from which it can be seen.

Moebius, a physician, has been widely criticized for writing a book in which, from a specialist's viewpoint, he presented the story of Nietzsche's development as the story of a progressive paralysis. I have never been able to participate in the indignation over

this. In his own way, this man tells nothing but the irrefutable truth.

In the year 1865, at the age of 21, Nietzsche told his friend and fellow-student Paul Deussen, later a famous Sanskrit and Vedanta scholar, a curious story. The young man had gone alone on an excursion to Cologne and there hired a public porter to show him the sights of the city. They went around all afternoon, and finally, toward evening, Nietzsche asked his guide to show him a decent restaurant. This fellow—who has in my eyes taken on the guise of a very sinister emissary—conducted him, however, to a house of prostitution. The youth, pure as a maiden, all spirit, all learning, all pious diffidence, suddenly found himself, so he says, surrounded by half a dozen apparitions in spangles and gauze who looked at him expectantly. Straight through their midst, the young musician, philologist, and admirer of Schopenhauer walked, instinctively going to a piano he spied in the back of the fiendish salon and in which he saw (these are his words) "the only being in the company with a soul"; and he struck a few bars. This snapped the spell he was under, the petrification, and he regained the open, he was able to flee.

The next day he must surely have laughed when he told his friends of this experience. He was not conscious of the impression it had made on him. Yet it was nothing more and nothing less than what psychologists call a *trauma*, a shock whose increasing after-effects, never thereafter abandoning his fantasy, testified to the susceptibility of the saint to sin. In the fourth part of *Zarathustra*, written twenty years later, an orientalizing poem is to be found, in the chapter "Among the Daughters of the Desert," whose shocking facetiousness reveals, with excruciatingly bad taste, a mortified sensuality whose inhibitions were already crumbling. In this poem about "dearest little lady friends and girl-cats, Dudu and Zuleika," an erotic day-dream whose humor is painful, the "fluttering and spangled skirts" of those professional ladies of Cologne are again present—still present. The "apparitions in spangles and gauze" of those days evidently served as models for the delectable daughters of the desert; and it is not far from them—only four years—to the Basel clinic where the patient stated for the record that in previous

years he had twice contracted a specific infection. The Jena case history gives the year 1866 for the first of these mishaps. Thus, one year after he fled from that house in Cologne, he had returned, this time without diabolic guidance, to a similar place and there contracted—some say deliberately, as self-punishment—that which was to sap, but also enormously to intensify, his life—even more, that which was to stimulate and irritate, in part for good, in part for evil, an entire epoch.

WHAT made him after a few years yearn to leave his academic position in Basel was a mixture of growing ill-health and a craving for liberty, both of which were fundamentally the same thing. The youthful admirer of Richard Wagner and Schopenhauer had at an early age proclaimed art and philosophy to be the true guides of life—in opposition to history, of which philology, his own special subject, was a part. He turned away from the latter, got himself pensioned off on the score of illness, and from then on lived without any ties in cosmopolitan spots in Italy, Southern France, and the Swiss Alps. There he wrote his books, dazzling in style, glittering with bold insults against his age, increasingly radical in psychology, and gleaming with an ever more intense white-hot light. In his correspondence he calls himself "a person who desires nothing more than to lose some comforting belief each day that passes, who seeks and finds his happiness in a liberation of the spirit that increases daily. It may be that I *want* to be even more of a free spirit than I am *able* to be!" This is a confession that was made very early, as early as 1876; it is an anticipation of his fate, of his breakdown; the prescience of a man who was to be driven to take upon himself knowledge more cruel than his mind could stand and who was to offer the world the spectacle of a deeply moving self-crucifixion.

He might well have written under his life's work, as did a famous painter: "*In doloribus pinxi.*" He would have been speaking the truth in more than one sense, in a spiritual as well as a physical one. In 1880 he confesses to a physician, Dr. Eiser: "My existence is a terrible burden: I would have thrown it off long ago, were it not that it is precisely in this state of suffering and of almost absolute abnegation that I make the

most instructive of all investigations and experiments in the spiritual and ethical field. . . . Continuous pain, for several hours of the day a feeling closely akin to seasickness, a partial paralysis during which I have difficulty speaking, and, for a change, furious attacks (the last one forced me to vomit for three days and three nights—I longed for death). . . . If I could only describe to you the *continuousness* of this sensation, the constant pain and pressure in my head, on my eyes, and that total feeling as though I were paralyzed from head to foot! . . . ”

It is hard to understand his seemingly complete ignorance—and that of his physicians on top of it!—of the nature and source of these sufferings. Gradually the fact that they came from his brain became a certainty, and he thought himself victim of a hereditary affliction: his father, he observes, perished from “softening of the brain”—which was certainly not true. Pastor Nietzsche died as the result of a mere accident, from a brain injury caused by a fall. Nietzsche’s total ignorance of the origin of his illness, or his dissimulation of its knowledge, can be explained only by the fact that the illness itself was entwined and connected with his genius, that the latter unfolded along with it—and that for a psychologist of genius *everything* can become the object of merciless knowledge—save only his own genius.

HIS own genius was the object, rather, of astounded admiration, exultant self-confidence, crass *hybris*. In all naivety Nietzsche glorified the ecstatic reverse side of his sufferings, those euphoric indemnifications and over-compensations that all belonged to the picture. He does this most magnificently in that almost completely uninhibited late work *Ecce Homo*—there where he praises the fabulously uplifted physical and mental state in which, in such an incredibly short time, he created his Zarathustra poem. This particular page is a masterpiece of style, a genuine verbal *tour de force*, comparable only to passages like the magnificent analysis of the *Meistersinger* prelude in *Beyond Good and Evil* and the Dionysian picture of the cosmos at the end of *The Will To Power*. “Does anybody,” he asks in *Ecce Homo*, “at the end of the 19th century have any notion of what the poets of *strong* epochs called inspiration? If not I’ll describe it.” And then he launches

into a description of revelations, ecstasies, elevations, whisperings, divine sensations of force and power, that he cannot but look upon as something atavistic, a demoniac throw-back belonging to other, “stronger” stages of human existence that were closer to God, beyond the psychic possibilities of our own weakling and rational age. And yet “in truth”—but what is truth: the experience itself, or medical science?—all he describes is the deleterious state of over-stimulation that mockingly precedes paralytic collapse.

Everybody will admit that it is a hysterical exaggeration of self-esteem, an exaggeration that reveals his slipping reason, when Nietzsche calls his *Zarathustra* an achievement compared to which all other human accomplishments seem poor and limited, when he claims that a Goethe, a Shakespeare, a Dante would never have been able to draw breath for even a moment on the heights of this book, and that the genius and the goodness of all great souls put together would never have been capable of producing one of Zarathustra’s orations. Of course it must be a great pleasure to write down things like this, but I find them impermissible.

And then again it may be that I am only confirming my own limitations when I go on to confess that for me Nietzsche’s relation to his Zarathustra work seems in any case to be one of blind overestimation. Because of its biblical flavor, it has become the most “popular” of his books, but it is not his best one by far. Nietzsche was above all a great critic and philosopher of civilization, a European prose writer and essayist of the highest rank, who came out of Schopenhauer’s school; his genius reached its peak at the time of *Beyond Good and Evil* and *The Genealogy of Morals*. Many a poet may amount to less than such a critic, but it was this very lessness that Nietzsche lacked, except in certain admirable lyrical moments that never sufficed for an extensive work of creative imagination. This faceless and formless monster, this tall, stately Zarathustra, with a rose crown of laughter on his unrecognizable head, with his “Grow hard!” and his dancer’s legs, is no creation; he is rhetoric, agitated verbal wit, tortured voice and dubious prophecy, a phantom of helpless *grandezza*, affecting at times but most often painful to watch—a monstrosity bordering on the ridiculous.

When I say this, I remember the desperate cruelty with which Nietzsche spoke about many, really about *all* the things he revered: about Wagner, about music in general, about morals, about Christianity—I nearly said: also about all things German—and how even in his most furiously critical outbreaks against these values and forces, which deep within his innermost self he respected, he never, obviously, had the feeling of really doing them harm, but seemed to feel rather that the most awful insults he hurled at them were a form of homage. He said such things about Wagner that we cannot believe our eyes when suddenly we find him talking in *Ecce Homo* about the “holy hour” in which Richard Wagner died in Venice. How is it, we ask with tears in our eyes, that this hour of death all of a sudden became “holy,” if Wagner was the appalling ham-actor, the debauched debaucher, Nietzsche a hundred times described him as?

He excused himself to his friend, the musician Peter Gaest, for his constant preoccupation with Christianity: really it was, he claimed, the best piece of idealistic life he had ever known. After all, he said, he was descended from generations of Christian ministers and did not think that he had “ever in his heart vilified Christianity.” No, but in a hysterical voice he had called it “the one immortal stain of dishonor upon humanity”—not without making fun at the same time of the contention that the primitive German had in some way or other been pre-formed or predestined for Christianity: that lazy but warlike and rapacious bear-skin-loafer, that sensuously cold lover of the hunt, that beer-drinker who had barely progressed as far as a halfway decent red Indian’s religion, and who no more than ten hundred years ago had slaughtered human beings on sacrificial stones—what affinity could he have had for the highest type of moral subtlety, sharpened as it was by rabbinical intellect, what affinity for the Oriental refinement of Christianity! His allocation of judgments is clear and amusing. To his autobiography, “Antichrist” gives the most Christian of all titles: *Ecce Homo*. And the last scribbles of insanity are signed “The Crucified.”

ONE can say that Nietzsche’s relation to his favorite objects of criticism was fundamentally that of passion: it was a passion

basically without a definite denomination, since the negative constantly changed over into the positive. Shortly before the end of his intellectual life he wrote a page about *Tristan* that vibrated with enthusiasm. On the other hand, at the time when his devotion to Wagner was at its apparent peak, just before writing his festival address, *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth*, for the public, he had already made remarks about *Lohengrin* to intimate friends in Basel—remarks of such detached perspicacity that they anticipated by one and a half decades the *Case of Wagner*.

There is *no* sharp break in Nietzsche’s relation to Wagner, no matter what one may say. The world always likes to see such breaks in the works and lives of great men. It found such a break in Tolstoy, where everything is iron consistency, where everything that came later was already psychologically formed earlier. It found such a break in Wagner himself, in whose development there reigned the same uninterrupted continuity and logic. It was no different with Nietzsche. No matter that his works, largely aphoristic, glitter with a thousand colorful facets, no matter that many superficial contradictions can be shown in him—he was all there from the very beginning, was always the same; and the writings of the youthful professor, his *Thoughts Out of Season*, his *Birth of Tragedy*, his essay “The Philosopher” of 1873, not only contain the seeds of his later doctrine, but this doctrine itself, a *joyful* one in his opinion, is already contained in them, finished and complete. What changes is only the emphasis, which constantly grows more frenetic, the pitch of his voice, which constantly grows shriller, the gestures, which constantly grow more grotesque and terrible. What changes is the way of writing, which, very musical from the beginning, degenerates gradually from the dignified discipline and somewhat old-fashioned restraint of German humanistic tradition into a weirdly mundane and hysterically cheerful super-pamphleteering style that in the end adorns itself with the cap and bells of a cosmic jester.

The completely unified and compact character of Nietzsche’s *oeuvre* cannot be stressed enough. Like Schopenhauer, whose disciple he remained even after he had long denied this master, he really spent his whole life

in varying, extending, and driving home one *single* omnipresent thought; this latter, altogether sound in the beginning and undeniably justified in its criticism of the age, fell prey in the course of time to such mae-nadic brutalization that Nietzsche's story can be called the story of the decline of this thought.

WHAT is this thought?—In order to understand it, we must analyze it right down to its ingredients, right down to its conflicting parts. Listed haphazardly, they are: life, culture, consciousness or cognition, art, nobleness, morality, instinct. The concept of *culture* dominates this complex of ideas. It is posited as almost equal to life itself: culture, that is the nobility of life, and connected with culture as its sources and determining conditions are art and instinct, whilst consciousness and cognition, science, and finally morals, figure as the mortal enemies and destroyers of culture. Morality, as the preserver of truth, kills life, because life rests essentially on appearance, art, deception, perspective, and illusion, and because error is the father of all that lives.

From Schopenhauer he inherited the proposition that "life as image alone, beheld in its purity or reproduced by art, is a meaningful drama," i.e. life can be justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon. Life is art and appearance, no more, and therefore *wisdom* (as the end of culture and life) stands higher than the *truth* (which is a matter of morality). It is a tragic, ironic kind of wisdom, which by artistic instinct sets limits to science for the sake of culture, and which defends life as the ultimate value in two directions: against the pessimism of those who slander life and uphold the hereafter or Nirvana—and against the optimism of the rationalizers and social reformers prattling about earthly happiness for all and about justice, and preparing the way for the socialist slave uprising. This tragic wisdom, which blesses life in all its falsity, hardness, and cruelty, Nietzsche baptized with the name of Dionysius.

The name of the drunken god first appears in that aesthetic-mystical book of his youth, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, in which the Dionysian as an artistic state and mental attitude is opposed to the artistic principle of Apollonian detach-

ment and objectivity, much in the same way that Schiller contrasted the "naive" to the "sentimental" in his famous essay. Here we hear for the first time about the "theoretical man," and a hostile stand is taken against Socrates, the archetype of this theoretical man: against Socrates, the despiser of instinct, the glorifier of consciousness, who taught that only what is conscious can be good, the enemy of Dionysius and the assassin of tragedy. According to Nietzsche, Socrates was the source of a scientific Alexandrine civilization, pale, scholastic, alien to myth, alien to life, a civilization in which optimism and faith in reason reigned supreme; the source, likewise, of practical and theoretical utilitarianism, which, like democracy itself, is a symptom of declining powers and physiological fatigue. The human being of this Socratic, anti-tragical civilization, the theoretical man, pampered as he is by optimistic contemplation, no longer wants to take anything *entirely*, in all the natural cruelty that belongs to things. But, as the young Nietzsche convinced himself, the time of the Socratic man was over. A new generation, heroic, bold, contemptuous of sickly doctrine, was entering upon the stage; a gradual awakening of the Dionysian spirit was to be perceived in the contemporary world, the world of 1870; out of the Dionysian depths of the German spirit, of German music, of German philosophy, tragedy was being reborn.

LATER he despairingly made fun of his one-time faith in the German spirit, and of everything he had read into it—namely, himself. He himself, in fact, was already completely contained in this as yet mild and humane, still romantically colored prelude to his philosophy. And his world perspective, his glance at the total picture of Western civilization, was already there, too, even though he was then primarily concerned with the German culture in whose high mission he believed, but which he saw in the gravest danger of betraying this mission through Bismarck's establishment of a power state, through politics, democratic leveling-down, and smug satiety with victory. His brilliant diatribe against the theologian David Strauss' senile and cheerful book, *The Old and the New Faith*, is the most immediate example of this criticism of a philistinism

of saturation, which was threatening to rob the German spirit of all its depth. And there is something deeply moving in the way the young thinker at this point already sends prophetic glances ahead to his own fate, which seems to lie before him like a tragic map. I refer to the passage in which he mocks at the ethical cowardice of Strauss, that vulgar enlightener who, he says, takes good care not to deduce any *moral precepts for life* from his own Darwinism, from the *bellum omnium contra omnes*, and from the superior rights of the strong, but instead contents himself with violent outbursts against preachers and miracles in which he always has the philistines on his side. He himself—he already knows this deep down inside himself—will do the ultimate, and not even shy away from madness, in order to turn the philistines *against* him.

IT is in the second of the *Thoughts Out of Season*, entitled "On the Benefit and Harm of History to Life," that that basic thought of his life which I mentioned above is most perfectly pre-formed, even though still clothed in a specific criticism. This admirable essay is fundamentally nothing but one great variation on that passage from *Hamlet* which mentions the "native hue of resolution" that "is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." The title is incorrect insofar as there is hardly any mention of the benefits of history—all the more does he talk, however, of its harm to life, dear, holy, aesthetically justified life.

The 19th century has been called the historical age, and indeed it was the first to create and develop that sense of history of which former civilizations, just *because* they were civilizations—artistically self-contained systems of life—knew little or nothing. Nietzsche goes so far as to speak of a "historical disease" that paralyzes life and its spontaneity. Education—today that means historical education. But the Greeks had known no historical education of any kind, and one would hesitate no doubt to call the Greeks uneducated. History for the sake of pure knowledge, carried on without life itself as its aim and without the counterweight of "plastic giftedness," creative uninhibitedness, is murderous, is death. An historical phenomenon as an object of cognition—is dead.

A scientifically cognized religion, for example, is doomed, is finished. An historically critical treatment of Christianity, Nietzsche says with conservative solicitude, dissolves it into sheer knowledge of Christianity. In examining religion from the point of view of history, he says, "there come to light things that necessarily destroy the reverential mood of illusion in which alone all things that want to live can do so." Only in love, shaded by the illusion of love, does man *create*. History must be treated as a work of art in order to make it contribute creatively to civilization—yet that would run contrary to the analytical and unartistic trend of the times. History banishes our instincts. Educated, or miseducated, by it, man is no longer able to "loosen the reins" and act naively, trusting in the "divine animal."

History always undervalues the becoming and paralyzes action, which must again and again do violence to objects of piety. What history teaches and creates is *justice*. But life does not need justice, it needs injustice, it is essentially unjust. "A great deal of strength is required," Nietzsche says (and it is doubtful whether he credited himself with this strength), "to be able to live and forget to what extent living and being unjust are one." Yet everything depends on forgetting. He wants the unhistorical: the art and power of being able to *forget* and to confine oneself within a limited horizon—a demand more easily made than met, we might add. For we are born with a limited horizon, and to confine ourselves within it artificially is an aesthetic masquerade and a repudiation of destiny out of which it would be hard for anything genuine and worthwhile to come.

But, very beautifully and nobly, Nietzsche wants our gaze to turn away from becoming and direct itself toward that which gives to existence the character of the eternal and permanent, toward art and religion. The enemy is science, for all it sees and knows is history and becoming, nothing permanent, eternal; it hates forgetting as being the death of knowledge and seeks to erase all the limitations of our horizon. But everything that lives needs a protective atmosphere, a mysterious zone of mist, and an enveloping illusion. A life dominated by science is much less life than one dominated, not by knowledge, but by instinct and *mighty hallucinations*. . . .

Today "mighty hallucinations" makes us

think of Sorel and his book *Sur la violence*, in which proletarian syndicalism and fascism are still one, and the mass myth, regardless of its truth or untruth, is declared to be the indispensable motor of history. We ask ourselves, however, whether it might not be better to preserve respect for reason and truth among the masses and at the same time honor their demand for justice, rather than plant mass myths and let loose upon humanity mobs dominated by "mighty hallucinations." Who does that today and for what purpose? Certainly not for the sake of civilization.

But Nietzsche knows nothing of masses and wants to know nothing of them. "The devil with them," he says, "and statistics too!" He desires and proclaims a time in which one will unhistorically and super-historically wisely refrain from making any sort of interpretive constructions from world processes, or from human history either; in which one will pay no more heed to the masses, but only to great individuals, timeless contemporaries of each other, who carry on their spiritual discourse high above the bustle of history. The goal of humanity, he says, lies not at its end, but in its highest representatives. That is his individualism: an aesthetic cult of the genius and hero that he took from Schopenhauer, together with the insistence that happiness is impossible and a *heroic* life is the only thing worthy and possible for the individual. Transformed by Nietzsche, and taken together with his adulation of the powerful and beautiful life, this resulted in a heroic aestheticism whose protective deity he proclaimed to be Dionysius, the god of tragedy. It is just this Dionysian aestheticism that made the later Nietzsche the greatest critic and psychologist of morality known in the history of the human mind.

HE WAS born to be a psychologist; psychology is his original passion: knowledge and psychology, these are for him fundamentally one and the same passion, and it characterized the entire inner contradictoriness of this great and suffering spirit that he, who valued life far above knowledge, was so completely and hopelessly caught in psychology. He was already a psychologist on the basis of Schopenhauer's finding that the will does not issue from the intellect, but vice versa, that intellect is not primary

and dominating, but the will, to which the intellect's relation is purely one of servitude. The intellect as a servile tool of will: that is the fount of all psychology, a psychology of suspiciousness and exposure; and Nietzsche, as spokesman for life, abandoned himself to a psychology of morals, suspecting all "good" urges of originating in bad ones, and proclaiming the "evil" ones to be those that ennoble and exalt life. This is "the transvaluation of all values."

What used to be called Socratism, "the theoretical man," consciousness, the historical sickness, Nietzsche simply called "morality," and "Christian morality" in particular, which was revealed as something completely poisonous, rancorous, and hostile to life. But at this point it should not be forgotten that Nietzsche's criticism of morality was somewhat impersonal in part, something that belonged to his time in general.

The time itself was that around the turn of the century, the time of the first assault of the European intellectuals upon the hypocritical morality of the Victorian bourgeois era; Nietzsche's furious battle against morality fitted into this picture to a certain extent—often indeed with an astounding family resemblance. It is astonishing to note the close affinity of many of Nietzsche's *aperçus* with the contemporaneous and by no means merely frivolous attacks upon morality with which Oscar Wilde, the English aesthete, shocked his public and made it laugh. When Wilde declares: "For, try as we may, we cannot get behind the appearance of things to reality. And the terrible reason may be that there is no reality in things apart from their appearances"; when he speaks of the "truth of masks" and of the "decay of lies," when he exclaims: "To me beauty is the wonder of wonders. It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible"; when he calls truth something so personal that two spirits can never honor one and the same truth; when he says: "Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. . . . The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it"; and: "Don't be led astray into the paths of virtue!"—all this might very well stand in Nietzsche's own writings. And one reads in the latter: "Seriousness, that unmistakable sign of a troublesome metabol-

ism."—"The lie sanctifies itself and the will to deceive has a clear conscience on its side in art."—"We are basically inclined to maintain that the most incorrect judgments are the ones most indispensable to us."—"It is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than appearance." There is not a single one of these sentences that could not appear in one of Oscar's comedies "and get a laugh in St. James's Theatre." When people wanted to praise Wilde very highly, they compared his plays to Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*. Much of Nietzsche seems to stem from this same school.

OF COURSE to juxtapose Nietzsche to Wilde has something almost sacrilegious about it, for the latter was a dandy, while the German philosopher was something like a saint of immorality. And yet, with his more or less deliberate martyrdom in Reading gaol at his life's end, Wilde's dandyism won a trace of sanctity that would have awakened Nietzsche's entire sympathy. What reconciled him with Socrates was the cup of hemlock, the end, the sacrificial death, and he believed that the impression this made on Greek youth and on Plato could not be overestimated. And his hatred of historical Christianity left the personality of Jesus of Nazareth untouched—again for the sake of the end, for the sake of the cross that he loved in his inmost heart and toward which he himself strode deliberately.

His life was intoxication and suffering—a highly artistic state, in mythological terms the union of Dionysius with the Crucified. Swinging the thyrsus, he ecstatically glorified the strong and beautiful, the amorally triumphant life, and defended it against atrophy at the hands of the intellect—and at the same time he paid homage to suffering as did none other. "The order of rank is determined," he says, "by how deeply a man can suffer." These are not the words of an anti-moralist. Nor is there any anti-moralism in it when he writes: "As far as pain and renunciation are concerned, the life of my last years can measure up to that of any ascetic of any age." But he did not write this as a plea for sympathy—rather with pride: "I want," he says, "to have it as hard as any man can possibly have it." He made things hard for himself, hard to the point of sanctity; for Schopenhauer's saint always re-

mained ultimately the highest type for him, and the "heroic life" was the life of the saint.

What defines the saint? That he does not do a single one of all the things he would like to do, and does all the things he does not want to do. That is how Nietzsche lived: "Renouncing everything I revered, renouncing reverence itself. . . . Thou must become master over thyself, master also over thine own virtues." This is the "act of vaulting over oneself" that Novalis mentions somewhere and which, he thinks, is the supreme deed under any circumstances. Now this "act" (a stage-performer's and acrobat's expression) has for Nietzsche nothing at all of exuberant or terpsichorean expertise. Anything "terpsichorean" in his attitude is vacillation and disagreeable to an extreme. It is much rather a bloody kind of self-mutilation, self-mortification, moralism. His very concept of truth is ascetic: for to him truth is what hurts, and he would be suspicious of any truth that was pleasant. "Among the powers," he says, "raised up by our morality was truthfulness: which, turning itself against morality in the end, discovers its own teleology, its own prejudiced mode of observation. . . ." His "immoralism" is thus the self-cancellation of morality for the sake of truthfulness. But he hints that this is itself a kind of exaggeration and luxuriance of morality by speaking of an inherited wealth of morality that could well afford to squander and throw away a great deal without becoming noticeably impoverished thereby.

ALL this lies behind those atrocities and drunken messages of power, violence, cruelty, and political trickery into which his idea of life as a work of art and his idea of culture as something unreflective and dominated by instinct, so brilliantly degenerate in his later writings. When a Swiss critic, on the *Bund* in Bern, wrote once that Nietzsche was making a plea for the abolition of all decent feelings, the philosopher was completely flabbergasted at being so utterly misunderstood. "Much obliged!" he said scornfully. For he had meant it all very nobly and humanitarianly, in the sense of a higher, deeper, prouder, *more beautiful* humanity, and he had not, so to speak, "meant any harm"—at any rate nothing evil, even if a lot of wickednesses. For everything that has

depth is wicked; life itself is profoundly wicked—it is not contrived by morality, it knows nothing of “truth,” but rests on appearances and artistic lies, it mocks virtue, for its essence is iniquity and exploitation. And, says Nietzsche, there is a pessimism of strength, an intellectual predilection for the hard, horrible, wicked, and problematical in our existence that arises from well-being, from the fullness of existence. This “well-being,” this “fullness of existence,” the euphoric sick man ascribes to himself and he takes it upon himself to proclaim as most worthy of affirmation those aspects of life which have until now been denied, especially by Christianity. Life above all!—why? He never said.

HE NEVER gave any reason why life should be something worthy of unconditional adoration and of preservation above all else, but declared only that life goes beyond knowledge, for with life knowledge destroys itself. Knowledge presupposes life and therefore is interested in it for the sake of self-preservation. It would seem therefore that there must be life in order for there to be something to know. But this logic does not strike us as sufficient to justify his enthusiastic championship of life. If he saw life as the creation of a God, then we would have to respect his piety, even though personally we might find little inducement to fall flat on our faces before the exploded cosmos of modern physics. But instead he sees life as a massive and senseless offspring of the will to power, and it is just its senselessness and

colossal immorality that should throw us into raptures. His cry of adoration is not “Hosanna!” but “Evoe!”—though the voice sounds unusually broken and tortured. The cry is supposed to deny that there is anything in man that transcends the biological, anything that does not expend itself completely in its investment in life; to deny also the possibility of detachment from this investment, a critical detachment—which is perhaps what Nietzsche calls “morality” and which will never indeed seriously do harm to dear life (life is much too incorrigible for that) but might nevertheless serve as a gentle corrective and sharpener of the conscience, which is all that Christianity ever did.

“There is no fixed point outside life,” says Nietzsche, “from which one may reflect on existence, no superior authority before whom life could be *ashamed* of itself.” Really not? One has the feeling that such an authority is present, and if it is not morality, then it is simply the spirit of man, humanity itself as criticism, irony, and liberty, united to the judging word. “Life is subordinate to no judge”? Yet somehow nature and life rise above themselves in man, in him they lose their innocence, they take on *spirit*—and spirit is the self-criticism of life. This humane something within us looks with doubtful sympathy on a “doctrine of the healthy life” which, though in sober days directed only against the sickness of historicity, later degenerated into bacchantic rage against truth, morality, religion, humaneness, and everything else that might serve passably to domesticate ferocious life.

(To be concluded in the next issue)